

Teen Health: Prescription Drug Abuse



It's a good idea for parents to talk to their children about the dangers of abusing prescription drugs. Prescription drugs are medicines given by a doctor. Teens abuse prescription drugs more than most street drugs. Often teens get prescription drugs from family or friends, with or without their knowledge. They think these drugs are safe, because they have medical uses. Teens may think these drugs help them feel better, fit in, lose weight, or do better in school.

Drugs most often misused by teens include pain relievers (Vicodin, Oxy-Contin, Percocet, Codeine), sedatives (Valium, Xanax, Ambien, Mebaral, Nembutal), and stimulants (Ritalin, Adderall). Teens may also use over-the-counter medicines like cough syrup and cold medicines to get high.

The Dangers

Prescription drugs can be as addictive and harmful as street drugs. Large amounts can slow down breathing and affect your heartbeat. They can be deadly if used to excess or mixed with other medicines or drugs.

Prevention: Stay Involved in Your Child's Life

- Talk to your teen about the risks of drugs.
- Help your child find healthy ways to deal with stress.
- Know the signs that your teen may be using drugs. For example, your child has lost interest in friends and normal activities. You may also notice changes in his or her appearance, school performance, or eating and sleeping habits.

Avoid Easy Access to Pills

- Keep all medicines in a cool, dry place out of your child's reach.
- Keep track of the number of pills you have. Throw out old or unused pills.
- Talk to family, friends, and other parents about preventing easy access.

What Can You Do If You Think Your Teen Is Abusing Prescription Drugs?

- Talk to your child when he or she is not high and when you are calm.
- Get help from your child's doctor or school counselor.
- Get more information on drug abuse. Call the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration at 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

If you have questions or concerns about your teen's coverage for substance abuse treatment, please call your teen's health plan.